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DE RUEHLB #0437/01 0451648

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 141648Z FEB 06

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2004

INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFIU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000437

SIPDIS

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KISL LE PGOV SY

SUBJECT: MGLE01: SAAD HARIRI LEADS MASS RALLY IN BEIRUT ON
THE ANNIVERSARY OF HIS FATHER'S ASSASSINATION

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) On February 14, MP Saad Hariri led a massive rally in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut to commemorate the assassination of his father Rafiq Hariri. Pleasant weather helped facilitate a large turnout carrying mostly Lebanese flags, but also Lebanese Forces and Progressive Socialist Party flags. Press reports suggested that as many as one million Lebanese showed up, although we cannot not confirm this estimate. Joining Hariri behind the bullet-resistant glass at the podium were MP Walid Jumblatt, Minister of Social Affairs Nayla Mouawad, MP Boutros Harb, former MP Nassib Lahoud, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'Ja', Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh, MP Bassem Saba, and former President Amin Gemayel. Also speaking were Nayla Tueni, Dory Chamoun, and Gamea Islamiyya's Head of Political Office Assad Harmuch. Journalist and assassination survivor May Chidiac spoke from Paris. In his speech, Saad Hariri listed all the factions that attended, noticeably omitting the absent General Michel Aoun, and the Amal and Hizballah political parties. Samir Ja'Ja' declared that "the Presidency is ours." Walid Jumblatt delivered the most vitriolic speech saying that forgiveness of Syria and its allies was impossible. Jumblatt rejected the Shebaa Farms pretext and instead called for liberating the "Farms of Baabda." Some local observers found the speeches, the ubiquitous Lebanese Forces flags, and the omission of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement to portray a divisive message. All speakers called for the removal President Lahoud; each time they did so, the crowd roared with approval. End summary.

LARGE, PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION
WITH IMPRESSIVE SPEAKER LIST

¶2. (U) According to press reports, as many as one million Lebanese attended MP Saad Hariri's demonstration in Martyrs' Square in downtown Beirut on February 14. The rally, held on the first anniversary of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, was organized and inspired by Saad Hariri upon his return to Lebanon after months of self-imposed exile in Paris and elsewhere. Most of the key figures in the 2005 Independence movement and March 14 coalition attended and spoke. Weather was on Hariri's side, as the usually rainy chill of Lebanon's winters subsided in favor of a sunny, mild day. The crowd was a sea of Lebanese flags, along with a large number of Lebanese Forces flags, a few Progressive Socialist Party flags, and a French flag. Television gave continuous coverage to the rally. Images showed a diversity in age of the demonstrators, whose ranks

included families with small children. Government offices and most shops were closed for the day.

13. (U) Hariri assembled an impressive group of speakers to deliver brief remarks behind the bullet-resistant glass encased podium. Among the speakers were MP Saad Hariri, MP Walid Jumblatt, Minister of Social Affairs Nayla Mouawad, MP Boutros Harb, former MP Nassib Lahoud, Lebanese Forces leader Samir Ja'Ja', Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh, MP Bassem Saba, and former President Amin Gemayel. Also speaking were Nayla Tueni (daughter of Gibran Tueni), National Liberal Party leader Dory Chamoun, and Gamea Islamiyya Head of the Political Office Assad Harmuch. Journalist and assassination survivor May Chidiac spoke from Paris. The speakers repeatedly invoked the names of Rafiq Hariri as well as the other Lebanese assassinated in the past year, including Gibran Tueni, Samir Kassir, and George Hawi. Former MP Nassib Lahoud garnered extra applause when he called for "one state, one nation, one army, one armament," a reference to disbanding Hizballah's state within a state and its militia.

NOTABLE OMISSIONS, POTENTIALLY DIVISIVE LANGUAGE

14. (SBU) Saad Hariri took the podium after an emotional visit to his father's gravesite accompanied by Sunni clerics. Hariri gave a fairly generic speech thanking those who attended the rally and calling for the Syrians to withdraw from Baabda, a reference to President Emile Lahoud. Hariri spent a considerable portion of his speech listing the factions and parties that attended the rally, noticeably omitting the absent Free Patriotic Movement, Amal, and Hizballah. (Comment: Our FSN political specialists

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commented that Hariri sent a divisive message by listing only the factions that attended. It suggested an "us versus them" approach towards Aoun and Amal-Hizballah. End comment.)

15. (SBU) Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Ja'Ja' was enthusiastically applauded as he took the podium. The crowd affectionately chanted "Al Hakim" (in Arabic "The Ruler"). Ja'Ja's speech was fairly bland other than his statement that "the Presidency belongs to us" and "we will take it back." (Comment: Our FSN political specialists interpreted Ja'Ja's statement as staking a claim on the Presidency at the expense of not only President Lahoud, but also Michel Aoun. End comment.) More notable were the chants of LF supporters in the audience: "God, Lebanese Forces, Al Hakim." This appeared to be a reference to the top three loyalties of LF supporters, blatantly omitting mention of loyalty to the country of Lebanon. The crowd also chanted: "Lahoud get out!" At the end of his speech, Ja'Ja' introduced Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and held hands with him in a victory gesture. They were quickly joined on stage by Hamadeh and Hariri, who had virtually "body surfed" through the crowd to join them.

16. (SBU) Druze leader Walid Jumblatt provided the most blustery speech. He called Syria and its allies criminals and said that forgiveness for their crimes is impossible. He repeated the word "impossible" in Arabic several times for effect. Jumblatt said: "We want revenge for Lahoud and Bashar." Anjar is dead, continued Jumblatt, but said that real independence is impossible without the implementation of international resolutions. He rejected the Shebaa Farms pretext and the Syrian-Iranian alliance. Jumblatt, instead, called for the liberation of the "Farms of Baabda," a reference to removing President Lahoud from power.

17. (SBU) No member of Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement took part in the demonstration. A deputy from Aoun's bloc told us his party was concerned for their "security and dignity" if they showed up at the event. Their concerns stem

in part from a February 5 incident during which LF supporters attacked Aoun's car at a local church.

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